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ABSTRACT

Literacy experts in composition have examined the exclusionary forces of academic discourse, and have identified various forms of classroom power that result from the system of academic literacy. Little is understood about the power relations that function to relate and regulate the classroom. Largely a humanistic notion, literacy has been defined in the American university system as academic literacy, that is, instruction that values standard English usage through logical hierarchies, subordination of one idea over another, and rationalizations and categorizations reached through text-assisted memory. By definition, academically literate standards exclude new participants. For instance, although compositionalists have worked to re-envision what it means to be academically literate, few acknowledge oral communication, nor do they acknowledge the regulating experiences a new initiate can gain from verbal exchange. Some scholars, such as Patricia Bizzell, believe in a more complex notion of power for the classroom. In Bizzell's ideal classroom, students should be invited, encouraged, and engaged in the production of literacy. A rhetorical perspective would dialectically relate the professor's canonical knowledge and the students non-canonical cultural resources, replacing a passive acquisition of canonical knowledge with active engagement. Bizzell, then, suggests that "persuasion" replace "coercion"; the students must know that the instructor has their best interests in mind. (TB)

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ED 377 502

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What does it mean to become literate in a community discourse or an academic discipline? This panel will consider the effect of literacy debates, and the initiation participants experience entering into discourse communities, and how in discourse power and knowledge are joined. In part, this paper will explore the ways people are engaged with and initiated into academic discourse communities, which is partially determined by what is meant by literacy. Literacy experts in composition have examined the exclusionary forces of academic discourse, and have identified various forms of classroom power that result from the system of academic literacy. Little is understood about the power relations that function to relate and regulate the classroom. Largely a humanistic notion, literacy has been defined in the American university system as academic literacy, that is, instruction that values standard English usage through logical hierarchies, subordination of one idea over another, rationalizations and categorizations reached through text-assisted memory, etc. Many composition specialists intend this subset of knowledges to provide more that just bare competence, but also to provide a basis for democratic communication. Yet as Rose persistently points out, academically literate standards continue to exclude new participants. Other theorists concerned with literacy, for example, Bizzell have recognized that ideaological and cultural relations are enacted to produce academic literacy, and that excercises of power are enacted through classroom discourse. Modern notions of academic literacy have also not alleviated the remedial status of those university writers without academic literacy. Writers that come to the university with strong home-bound literacies are placed at a disadvantage, because the discourse they have learned at home and within their community do not conform to university conventions. Clearly there are power issues at work here.

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Within the university disciplines, subsets of canonical texts have led the academy to value thought and writing that utilize hierarachial strategies. These language habits are intended to broaden the student's ability within the larger community. Privileging text-assisted literacy, some academic literacy theorists dichotomize literacy and orality. Long established within the foundations of humanism, notions of academic literacy have been further cemeted into an oppositional notion. Important humanists and educators such as E.D. Hirsch and Walter Ong have recently recemented this oppositional notion, privileging alphabetic literacy as a more efficient form of thinking, as its reduced system of symbols has the possibility to represent *more* ideas with less generalization. Only a decade ago, Ong echoed one foundationalist assumption implicit in the division of orality and literacy, "(w)riting," he said, "is conscious raising." Through its history, academic language have become valued as a learning tool, a spiritual guide and a superior form of knowing.

Community discourses, particularly oral modes, were not recognized as "legitimate." Humanist foundations demanded that literacy specialists focus more on the written text, than on the individual's home-knowledge, thus ignoring the powerful status of discourse conventions and of their more knowledgable and instantiated participants. However, the relations of power that pre-exist as these communities admit newcomers must be considered. Heath's *A Way with Words* is one such example that reveals to us the power that goes beyond the knowledge of a simple discourse convention. Heath sheds light on forms of discourse power through her ethnographic contextualization of the Trackton and Roadville communities, and through their ensuing development of language and education. Heath found for instance that initiation or acceptance into oral forms of community assumed a more complex set of relations: "Oldtimers," she observed," frequently assert their long familiarity with certain norms." Storytelling illustrates their knowledge of current community and past community. The storyteller, nominated by the last storyteller or the individual who announces their story, has control of the talk. The elder, controlling storyteller is described as managing the flow of talk, staging the

story, and dictating the topic that all participants will adhere to and move around through the next storyteller. In this way the participants must earn the right to collaborate, earning the right to speak.

Although compositionalists have worked to re-envision what it means to be academically literate, many continue to investigate notions of canonical knowledge and ideals of written literacy. Yet few aknowledge the power of oral communication, nor do they acknowledge the regulating experiences a new initiate can gain from verbal exchange. In part, this deemphasis on oral literacy has functioned to seam over power relations that are also part of discourse initiation. For instance, Rose's historical examination of the literacy debate does reveal the notion of academic literacy as it constructs an exclusive language situation. Traditional classroom power, as Bizzell situates it, is coerced, as the instructor imposes good standards of writing upon the initiate. Traditionally the initiate's inability to discourse academically has been defined as an illness, sometimes spiritual, sometimes psychological, but always in the state of deficiency. Yet Heath's examination of discourse community reveals there is more to its surface. Initiation into a discourse community, as Heath's study reveals, goes beyond mere convention. Initiation into a discourse community implicates community position, community history, and the power an elder member has of choosing her or his subordinates discussion topics.

These forms of exclusivity have been noticed and their subordinating powers have been revealed within certain theoretical borders of composition. The academic community itself is beginning to realize the complex ideological and cultural values which in turn structure academic literacy. Although foundationalism still abounds, other academic histories of literacy now offer different terms for the literacy debate, for example, Swales, Lempke, and Bazerman examine various ways discourse communities have developed. Many social scienctists now recognize that cognitive change is, in part, conditioned through social context, and today in the academy, notions exist of literacy as a multiple and pluralistic task. New notions of literacy

that reach beyond foundationalism now engage discourse participants through variant levels of oral and written language. Literacy as a totalizing notion is moving towards a conceptualization as a way with words.

It is clear that compostion researchers need to constantly review and compare academic histories of literacy. Acknowledging literacy's foundations would further enable composition specialists to publically recognize that knowledge is what occurs when discourse is successful. To do this, Bizzell believes a more complex notion of power must be found, or the classroom will continue to generate the tradition of unjust power relations and traditional forms of exclusion related to academic training. In Bizzell's ideal classroom, students should be invited, encouraged, and engaged in the production of literacy. A rhetorical perspective would dialectically relate the professor's canonical knowledge and the student's non-canonical cultural resources, replacing a passive acquisition of canonical knowledge with active engagement. Bizzell's vision of a truly collaborative classroom would also contain a complex notion of power, one of the few offered in composition theory today. Through a class-produced rhetorical examination, a classroom could uncover the cultural conditions of canon subsets and their foundations. Through Bizzell's rhetorical revision, literacy can become defined as a collaborative effort, a dialogic of professors' canonical knowledge and the students' cultural resources. This notion of power, Bizzell upholds, can be differentiated. Coercion is only one, elemental form of power resulting from a traditional classroom. Persuasion, a second form of power, is based upon a collaborative classroom, where the instructor must convince the student of his or her knowledge ability as a teacher of good writing.

One important differentiation between coercion and persuasion is the level of power exercised by the instructor. In the circumstance of coercion, the student can only be influenced by the instructor. In the act of persuasion, the instructor can be

collaboratively influenced by the student's own cultural literacy. In persuading the student, the instructor must consider the student's background and the writing purpose. Persuasion for Bizzell involves a "collaborative enterprise" of communication, illustrating that not all power is oppressive, but can be exercised for the benefit of the student.

Authority is the exercise of power that first persuades, when the student grants the instructor authority to teach. Once students have been persuaded the instructor has "their best interests in mind", the students will empower the instructor to direct their schooling. Bizzell believes public philosophies can be examined to reveal oppressive norms and practices of domination. Authority can mediate and negotiate teaching and the defense of a non-oppressive learning system. The classroom could house a view of text that is multi-cultural and allows for diversity of voices. This model can allow the instructor to be a "transformative authority," where the historical construction of texts becomes the object of study, as discourse power and authority is recognized. Only then can the exercise of power be understood as a possibility for the creation of a democratic pedagogy of composition, and, perhaps some way to value dealing with difference in American society.

Yet for Bizzell, classroom authority means more than allowing students to process and develop their own standards. Authority also indicates the practice of a contextualized, politically engaged variety of communication skills such as discussion, reading, composing, and arguing. A rhetorical investigation of political compacts and associated texts from many cultural groups should be surveyed, involving many disciplinary faculty and students, and the local community's awareness of these compacts Through this pluralistic, but contextualized setting, the composition classroom can provide an examination of decision-making processes within American culture, that not only aids in its creation, but provides further support of an

always potentially oppressive educational system. Although Bizzell believes in the retention of an academic literacy, she also believes its cultural relationships should be examined.

Yet when authority and its forms of power are examined from particular local and oral roots, when the foundational division between orality and literacy is placed in the spotlight, Heath found academic literacy a kind of talk that begins early guiding the townspeople's children on their way towards school literacy. The children of both rural communities of Roadville and Trackton illustrated that multiple uses of written and oral language do exist, but within a knowledge structure, in form, function, occasion and content that varied "in degree and kind from patterns followed by the townspeople" (231). Heath finalizes her observations of language development in education: "Academic success beyond the basis of readiness depends on becoming a contextualist who can predict and maneuver the scenes and situations by understanding the relatedness of parts to the outcome or the identity of the whole" (Heath 353). The type of contextualization that Bizzell names through authority is not realization enough for the initiate to "predict and maneuver." To predict and maneuver implicates other power issues, one's not explicitly dealt with in these discussions of power and discourse community initiation. Other questions must be considered, such as, what investment will the initiate need to make before being admitted to a discourse? Through what forms of evaluation must participants pass? Where does the power to evaluate reside? In what ways are power and knowledge joined in discourse? How can these answers be acknowledged in our practices of writing? What forms of power are observable in the classroom climate? What kinds of information are easily understood within this climate, for example, an attendance policy or achieving a grade? What misunderstandings occur because of power relations inside the classroom?